

Security Information

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Condensation of GENIE Study, THE PROBLEM OF SUCCESSION

Stalin's achievements in the last 25 years are impressive. He has built a country peopled by 160 different nationalities and debilitated by two wars and internal chaos into the second most powerful nation in the world. In the process, he has made himself the final, all-powerful authority on all Soviet domestic and foreign matters. Other Soviet officials, many of them top-rank in brilliance, ability, and ruthlessness, are only department heads under him. They do not make policy, they administer Stalin's.

The apparent absence of any firm plan of succession to take over after Stalin's dictatorship could result in crisis, sooner or later.

Three elements which might contribute to a post-Stalin crisis are:

1. Tensions and dissatisfactions which evidently pervade Soviet society;
2. Rebellion in the military--key to power in any dictatorship--over political harassment;
3. Rivalry between Stalin's successors.

Stalin's system of rule seems to preclude the emergence of one heir-apparent and to aim, instead, to divide and shift power between four elements--the Party, Police, Military and Bureaucracy.

Four post-war developments worth noting are:

1. The Party's power has declined to administrative functions over propaganda and intelligence;
2. Beria and Police power have increased;

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3. The Party and Police have joined forces under Bulganin to impede Military ascendancy; and

4. The Bureaucracy has become a vested and privileged class.

At Stalin's death, the able and experienced Soviet leaders, despite likely feelings of frustration or insecurity, will have two incentives to cooperate—the need of unity to maintain internal control of the USSR and the desire to present a picture of strength and unity to the West. They may, (1) agree on a single man or committee as a figurehead leader; (2) bow to a testament, if any, left by Stalin; (3) accept the emergence of a successor who seizes power, after paving his way in advance with Stalin's blessing.

Adoption of any of the three above possibilities would produce calm immediately after Stalin's death but would probably not indefinitely postpone a struggle for absolute power by one man. This struggle, in which the Military would necessarily be involved, could be triggered by crises or conspiracies caused by personal rivalries; disputes over policies (economic, for example); rivalry between Old and New Bolsheviks; dissatisfaction in the Military. These possibilities are expanded in the study titled, [REDACTED]

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